

Testimony of John C. Murray 3/24/16

Mr. Chairman & Members of the North Carolina House Subcommittee:

Thank you for allowing me to testify about Step Therapy. My name is John C. Murray, MD and I am a Professor of Dermatology at Duke University Medical Center, where I have been seeing patients for the past 37 years. Our clinic patients, many of whom have psoriasis, tend to be more involved and these patients require medications that are affected by Step Therapy. I am testifying on behalf of our patients to provide them better care. The decision to treat patients with psoriasis requires the provider and the patient to agree on three essential points. We must decide 1- how clear the patient wants to be 2- at what risk and 3-at what cost. Between the provider and the patient there is an imaginary trough. Pharmaceutical companies have lined up on one side of the trough and on the other side of the trough the insurance carriers have lined up so that they may profit by whatever passes between the provider and the patient.

Step Therapy is an attempt to control costs. We remain dedicated to controlling costs whenever it is possible. New treatments for psoriasis tend to be expensive and at times they seem obscenely expensive. Nevertheless, the real cost of treating patients with psoriasis results from long term sequelae of poorly controlled skin disease. Accumulating evidence suggests that long standing uncontrolled psoriasis leads to a significantly higher risk of cardiovascular disease. If patients in their 20s with severe psoriasis are not adequately treated, their risk of cardiovascular disease at a later age rises three-fold. Long standing uncontrolled psoriasis leads to increased risk of comorbidity from hypertension, obesity, diabetes and elevated lipids. Information has been published that shows that control of psoriasis by biologic treatment such as etanercept or adalimumab decreases these risks for cardiovascular disease. Accumulating information associates psoriasis with kidney disease and infection as well. Not controlling severe psoriasis can lead to significant medical problems and increase medical costs in the long run. The weight of medical evidence indicates that controlling severe and widespread psoriasis is imperative in the long run to controlling long term medical costs even though the upfront cost of newer treatments may seem so expensive. Patients are told that treatments with lesser efficacy and more risk of adverse effects are covered by their insurance carriers. When these treatments fail then treatments with more efficacy and fewer adverse effects are covered.

Recently in our dermatology clinic I saw a young female college student with severe and widespread psoriasis unresponsive to topical therapy. Step Therapy would direct me to begin with Methotrexate. The student is from North Carolina mountain area and goes to college in the Midwest.. On Methotrexate laboratory, laboratory tests would have to be performed each week for 4 weeks then once per month so arrangements would have to be made to obtain this testing. As a young female she would have to be counseled to avoid pregnancy. On Methotrexate her participation in college social life would require refraining from alcohol consumption. Another step to be considered would be phototherapy. Since the most common skin cancer in a young female is melanoma, placing such a patient in intensive UV light cabinets is not optimal for her long term health. The next step would include subcutaneous injections with etanercept or adalimumab. She would have to undergo training and keep syringes with medication in her college dormitory refrigerator. I placed her on a medication called apremalast which was a pill that she could take twice daily. With this medication no laboratory tests are required and no injections are performed This medication cleared her skin and she returned for her 2nd semester of college with a new outlook on a medication that she could tolerate and worked well, even though it was not approved according to the necessary Step Therapy imposed by her insurance company

Many issues arise in determining the best treatment for a particular individual. Step Therapy is an attempt by insurance companies to limit costs by delaying and obstructing. Such delays and obstructions mean that patient's skin problems may progress and place them at risk for other health and medical problems. Step Therapy is intended to save costs but the delay and obstruction may lead to worsening of an individual's skin problem, which may have other long term risks and costs as well. The initial cost of a more expensive medicine may pale in comparison to the long term costs of other medical problems. Any delay or obstruction in providing effective treatment for our patients generally lowers quality of life and patient care. I ask that you respect the health and wellbeing of our patients ahead of profits of the insurance companies.